

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
North Carolina State University

Philosophy Colloquium Series

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HARM REDUCTION IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

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Thursday, February 21, 2019, 4:30 p.m.
Withers Hall, Room 331

Map: http://www.ncsu.edu/campus_map/north.htm

All are welcome

Abstract

The punitive, moralizing conception of individual responsibility commonly associated with retributive justice not only exaggerates the moral meaning of criminal guilt, at least in many cases; it also distracts from shared responsibility for social injustice. Instead of highlighting the moral urgency of correcting conditions of socioeconomic inequality, which help to explain the crime rate, a commitment to retribution diverts attention from the social conditions that engender crime.

Still, when it comes to truly objectionable acts, considerations of public safety permit active measures designed reasonably to protect everyone's basic rights. These measures include punishment that aims to reduce the harm crime does. A *harm reduction* approach, unlike the aim of retribution, joins an account of the permissibility of punishment with a recognition that the problem of crime cannot be solved short of securing terms of social justice. It does this by imposing moral limits to how much we can punish in order to reduce crime. These limits are stricter than what retributivists would accept. To that extent, criminal wrongdoing must be tolerated. In this way, a harm reduction approach to criminal justice incorporates an element of shared responsibility.

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